

WALL STREET
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REVIEW and OUTLOOK

On Preserving Democracy

The Center for the Study of Democratic Institutions, a privately financed continuing study group, has been devoting itself to "methods of preserving democracy and the dignity of the individual."

For this purpose a number of people the Center thinks might make useful contributions were invited to join in a rather free-wheeling discussion with each other and with members of the staff who are preparing "working papers" on various questions of public interest.

In the current issue of The Center Diary some excerpts from these conversations and from the working papers are published under the heading "Notes for a Journal." They are, admittedly, snippets which may not fully reflect all the views of those speaking. Nonetheless, the Center found them interesting enough to publish, and so do we.

Here are some of the excerpts, as quoted or summarized by the Center:

From W. H. Ferry: The Federal structure of the United States is faulty, the "states are an anachronism and a source of injustice preventing rational use of all resources for all peoples" . . . the Constitution is an obstacle to the achievement of equality and complete citizenship for all.

From a working paper: ". . . we are in the middle of a true historical disjuncture which demands the re-examination of all our values and all our institutions" . . . Our present social system is outmoded.

From Robert Heilbroner: We should examine capitalism as a "system of privileges, a secular religion" . . . in most societies the military and the religious have gotten most of the surplus, "in ours the merchant businessman gets it" . . . We have to de-economize society—to move the marketplace back from the center of things . . . We need higher taxes and control of consumption."

From Harvey Wheeler: Science has proceeded "beyond the promethean solitary scientist" . . . It is necessary to constitutionalize science . . . We need a Federal science agency system in which decisions will be made—bureaucratically.

Again from Mr. Ferry: The problem of the scientific enterprise "is not a scientific problem" . . . it is a political planning problem, and it "ought to be treated as such."

From Ralph Helstein: The automobile industry in 1963 produced one million more cars than it did in 1957, with 27% fewer workers . . . The problem requires a national-political solution and may necessitate the establishment of manpower controls.

From Michael Harrington: The ultimate solution to poverty will have to be at the Federal level and will involve national democratic planning . . . "We will need some redistribution of wealth."

From a working paper: "The traditional professions have eroded under the conditions of a scientific, technological, democratic society. The most easily recognized sign of this erosion is that the members have increasingly joined the market; they have chosen to sell their services for money . . ."

There are other statements in a like vein, and we don't single out these few to argue here with their individual views on the specific matters, although we have wide areas of disagreement. What interests us is the common thread that runs through all of these statements, whether they deal with the Federal structure of the Government or the role of scientists in society.

These are not, it seems clear to us, the views of men who are merely trying, through criticism, to improve and strengthen the existing institutions and social values of the country. The common thread in all these statements is that of hostility to the system itself.

It is one thing to want to alter the Federal structure of Government for the better, or to improve the Constitution. It is something else to say that the whole idea of local governments, which is the heart of our democratic system, is an anachronism, or to assert that the whole Constitution is the obstacle to be removed.

It is one thing to be critical of the way American society operates in some areas—civil rights, for example—and to seek ways of bringing practice closer to the ideal. It is something else to charge that the whole of the social system is outmoded and to demand that all values—not some but all—be challenged.

Men may find reasons for arguing that a centralized State should control what the people consume, or where and for what wages men should work, but the reasons are surely not those of preserving democracy. Men may argue that work of scientists should be "bureaucratically" controlled (Marxist socialists have argued it for years), but the argument is certainly not that it preserves man's dignity or the dignity of his mind.

There's nothing new about any of these statements, and we found them all interesting. What struck us as strange is that they come from a center devoted to the preservation of democratic institutions.

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Pers: Ferry, W. H.

Pers: Heilbroner, Robert

Pers: Wheeler, Harvey

Pers: Helstein, Ralph

Pers: Harrington, Michael